



H.Res. 655 – Honoring the life and accomplishments of Katherine Dunham

FLOOR SITUATION

H.Res. 655 is being considered on the floor under suspension of the rules and will require a two-thirds majority vote for passage. This legislation was introduced by Representative Charles Rangel (D-NY) on September 17, 2007. The legislation was referred to the House Committee on Education and Labor but was never considered.

H.Res. 655 is expected to be considered on the floor of the House on July 22, 2008.

SUMMARY

H.Res. 655 resolves that the House of Representatives:

- Honors the life and accomplishments of Katherine Dunham; and
- Recognizes Katherine Dunham's immeasurable contributions to the arts and all of humanity.

BACKGROUND

Katherine Dunham was born on June 22, 1909 and passed away on May 21, 2006. She was 96 at the time of her death. She was an author, a dancer, a choreographer, and a civil rights activist. Her first article was published in a magazine edited by W.E.B. Dubois.

In 1931 she founded the Les Ballet Negre, which was the first black ballet company in the United States. She later went on to found the Dunham School of Dance and Theater in Manhattan, New York. She also founded the Katherine Dunham Museum and Children's Workshop in 1977 and the Katherine Dunham Centers for Arts and Humanities in 1969. She used dance and theater to bring attention to the issue of segregation. On several occasions she would refuse to perform if she found out that African Americans were mistreated in the area or not allowed to buy tickets.

She was also called upon to direct choreography for many Broadway productions such as Aida, the 1859 opera Faust, and Banboche. Katherine was called upon by Southern Illinois University to be their "artist-in-residence". While there she opened up a school in East St. Louis to reduce the crime and poverty in the region.

She later went on to protest the United States' treatment of Haitians by going on a 47 day hunger strike when she was 82 years old.

STAFF CONTACT

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